

Message Text

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ACTION EA-12

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E.O. 11652: NA
TAGS: SHUM, PINT, RP
SUBJECT: AQUINO PRESS CONFERENCE

REF: MANILA 3940

1. ON MARCH 11, ONE DAY AFTER HIS "FACE THE NATION" TELEVISION INTERVIEW (REFTEL), OPPOSITION LEADER BENIGNO AQUINO WAS PERMITTED TO HOLD PRESS CONFERENCE AT FORT BONIFACIO. AQUINO WAS QUESTIONED FOR ABOUT ONE HOUR BY FOREIGN AND LOCAL CORRESPONDENTS IN AMPHITHEATER ADJACENT TO HIS DETENTION QUARTERS. SINCE MARTIAL LAW AQUINO HAS BEEN INTERVIEWED INDIVIDUALLY BY A FEW FOREIGN REPORTERS, BUT THIS IS THE FIRST TIME HE HAS BEEN ALLOWED TO HOLD A PRESS CONFERENCE. THE MANILA PRESS REPORTED HIS REMARKS IN CONSIDERABLE DETAIL THE FOLLOWING DAY. HIGHLIGHTS FOLLOW.

2. AQUINO WAS ASKED ABOUT DEFENSE SECRETARY ENRILE'S CHARGE THAT HE APPLIED TO BUT WAS REJECTED BY THE CIA. HE REPLIED "I STAND BY THE RECORDS AND I STAND BY WHAT I SAID IN THE TV INTERVIEW. I NEVER WAS A CIA AGENT BUT IT IS ALSO TRUE THAT I WORKED WITH THE CIA IN INDONESIA, I MET WITH THE CIA STATION CHIEF IN ALGIERS."

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3. AQUINO EXPRESSED AGREEMENT WITH PRESIDENT MARCOS ON FOREIGN POLICY, ADDING THAT "MY QUARREL WITH HIM IS ON DOMESTIC ISSUES." HE OPPOSED DISMANTLING THE US MILITARY BASES (REPORTED SEPTTEL).

4. AQUINO CALLED UPON MARCOS TO GRANT AMNESTY TO ALL POLITICAL PRISONERS. HE SAID HE HIMSELF WOULD ACCEPT

AMNESTY IF IT WERE GRANTED TO ALL POLITICAL PRISONERS AND IF THERE WERE NO CONDITIONS ATTACHED. HE SIDESTEPED A QUESTION ON WHETHER OR NOT HE WOULD ACCEPT A PARDON, SAYING THIS WAS STRICTLY A UNILATERAL PRESIDENTIAL PREROGATIVE.

5. AQUINO CHARACTERIZED THE ELECTION OF AN INTERIM BATASANG PAMBANSA AS A "GOOD" STEP TOWARD NORMALIZATION. HE URGED MARCOS TO TAKE OTHER STEPS IN THIS DIRECTION, INCLUDING ABOLITION OF MILITARY TRIBUNALS TRYING CIVILIAN CASES, CONSOLIDATION OF ALL GUN CONTROL AND ANTI-SUBVERSION LAWS, ENACTMENT OF FREEDOM OF INFORMATION DECREE TO ENABLE CITIZENS TO CORRECT GOVERNMENTAL INJUSTICES, IMPLEMENTATION OF EXISTING LAWS SETTING UP OMBUDSMEN (TANOD BAYAN) TO HEAR COMPLAINTS AGAINST GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS, AND MODIFICATION OF THE 1978 ELECTION CODE TO ENSURE HONEST ELECTIONS. AQUINO ALSO URGED THAT A BLUE RIBBON COMMITTEE BE SET UP TO INVESTIGATE QUESTIONABLE TRANSACTIONS OF THE GOVERNMENT.

5. THROUGHOUT THE PRESS CONFERENCE, AQUINO MAINTAINED THE MODERATE, ALMOST MAGNANIMOUS TONE THAT MARKED HIS TV INTERVIEW. AT THE BEGINNING OF THE CONFERENCE HE THANKED PRESIDENT MARCOS FOR ALLOWING HIM TO MEET WITH REPORTERS. HE ACKNOWLEDGED THAT MARTIAL LAW HAS NOT BEEN ALL BAD, CITING AN IMPROVED LAW AND ORDER SITUATION. HE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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SAID MARCOS DESERVED GRATITUDE OF THE PEOPLE FOR STRIDES MADE IN LAND REFORM. HE SAID HE BELIEVED MARCOS REALLY WANTS A CLEAN ELECTION "BECAUSE HE WANTS TO KNOW THE FEELING OF THE PEOPLE." ASKED WHAT WE WILL DO IF HE LOSES THE IBP ELECTION, AQUINO SAID HE WOULD MERELY KEEP QUIET AND CONTINUE TO WRITE HIS BOOK. "MAYBE LATER, IF PRESIDENT MARCOS NO LONGER CONSIDERS ME A POLITICAL BURDEN, HE MAY RELEASE ME."

NEWSOM

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